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SIPDIS

FROM U.S. MISSION IN ROME
FOR THE AMBASSADOR FROM AMB TONY HALL
STATE FOR A/S DINA POWELL, IO DAS LAGON, A/S PRM DEWEY,
IO/EDA, IO/PPC, R, IIP, PA
NSC FOR MELINE
USDA FOR U/S BOST, FAS - MCHAMBLISS AND LREICH
USAID FOR DAA/DCHA WGARVELINK, FFP LANDIS, DCHA/OFDA, LPA

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SUBJECT: "HUNGER BANQUETS" AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY A
PROPOSAL

REF:(A) Rome 4673

Summary

1. (U) I would like to bring to your attention a big public diplomacy success story in hopes that our experience might work as well for your mission as it did for us. It has the potential to bring broad media attention to the story of U.S. generosity -- a story that needs to be told.

2. (U) Last Fall, USUN Rome focused world media attention on the United States as a humanitarian leader in the fight against hunger through a "hunger banquet" that I hosted at my residence. The event colorfully brought the plight of the hungry to invited guests by dividing them in the same access-to-food proportions found generally in the world. The press loved it. From India to Wales to Australia, articles praised the initiative. Letters from teachers, kids, and community groups applauded the effort to highlight the realities of poverty.

3. The "hunger banquet" (we called it a "Special Thanksgiving Reception") demonstrated the worldwide market for stories on humanitarian themes and offered a platform to spotlight America's tradition of generosity. This initiative carries significant public diplomacy potential and could be mobilized in many countries to support the U.S. and its response to world humanitarian crises. Such themes have particular resonance among Muslim populations, as recently shown in a study by the Council of Foreign Relations (see para 7). We propose expanding the "hunger banquet" format world wide for use alongside Embassy efforts to highlight and celebrate our own Thanksgiving holiday in November. End Summary.

Rice for "Cookie-Pushers"

4. (U) During our 2004 Thanksgiving celebration, we hosted at the Ambassador's residence a reception that borrowed from a "hunger banquet" format used by a well-known humanitarian NGO. The purpose was to vividly introduce guests to the world's wide disparity in the availability of food. Upon arrival, guests chose a color-coded card that separated them into three categories: 60 percent were served rice under a tent outside and represented the 60 percent of the world's population that lives without sufficient food security; about 25 percent ate rice and beans in the residence foyer, just barely inside the door, as do about 25 percent of today's people; and just a handful was served a posh meal, complete with crystal, china, and wine. After about 30 minutes, everyone was gathered inside to talk about the event, and we then opened a traditional buffet. The numerous Ambassadors present loved the format, and we received afterwards complaints from others who would have wanted to be invited. [Note: We used the NGO's user-friendly format that has been duplicated all over the U.S., including on Capitol Hill, and by universities and grass roots organizations. A banquet planning kit gives easy-to-follow tips for the host organization, including background materials that we used for an information sheet faxed to guests in advance. End Note.]

5. (U) In addition to our normal Mission contacts, we also invited a small group of journalists, one of whom posted a piece that caught international media attention. Articles on the event ran on page three in the "International Herald Tribune", the front page of "The Daily Telegraph", and in the "Indian Express", the "Sydney Morning Herald", and the "The Sunday Times" of London. The Ambassador spoke with several local and national BBC radio stations. He was interviewed by Radio Europe and the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation. The Mission received notes of thanks from all over the world for having the courage to demonstrate the realities of poverty to a group of international diplomats. Even months later, the buzz over our "hunger banquet" continued among UN Rome-based permreps.

Proposal: With a Little Help for Our Friends

16. (U) Our "hunger banquet's" broad media response came at a time when there was an urgent need to engage world audiences with positive images of the United States. Our success suggests that there may be an important public diplomacy opportunity to spotlight our humanitarian initiatives in Africa, Southeast Asia and among Muslim populations. A worldwide hunger banquet hosted by U.S. diplomatic missions would most certainly punctuate the United States as a leader in the Millennium Development Goal effort to cut the number of hungry people in half by 2015.

17. (U) An "international hunger banquet" might also help soften the USG image in light of the rise in anti-Americanism worldwide. It would present an opportunity to discuss U.S. humanitarian assistance with embassy contacts, many or most of whom are not aware of the important role the United States plays in humanitarian assistance. We note, for example, the Council on Foreign Relations recent report that shows humanitarian assistance is the one subject on which the USG can effectively engage Muslim audiences, change opinions about its policies, and reduce widespread anti-Americanism. It noted that Muslim focus groups, when learning via media reports of U.S. tsunami relief efforts in Indonesia or our support for women's rights in Morocco, significantly improved their attitudes toward the United States. "It makes a real difference to Muslims' views of America when they learn of U.S. aid in areas that matter to them," the report concluded.

Hall

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